



Press Clipping Article

Title: Late freeze causes widespread damage in Kentucky agriculture

Date: 04/17/2007

Source: [Associated Press](#)

Writer: BRUCE SCHREINER

Lead:

Western Kentucky farmer Scott Wilferd's wheat crop was shaping up as one of his best until a late freeze turned lush fields into a patchwork of damaged plants.

Article:

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) -- Western Kentucky farmer Scott Wilferd's wheat crop was shaping up as one of his best until a late freeze turned lush fields into a patchwork of damaged plants.

Now he's hoping to salvage a harvest from his 800 acres that had been thriving from a stretch of warm temperatures until the sudden turnaround sent temperatures plunging.

"At best, if we have good conditions from now on, we are seeing at least just half a crop," the Graves County farmer said in a telephone interview Monday.

Farmers are still assessing damage from frigid temperatures earlier this month that harmed a cross section of Kentucky's agricultural sector - from fruit orchards and vineyards to grain and hay fields.

It's too soon to put a firm number on losses, but the damage appears to exceed \$45 million, said Bill Clary, a spokesman for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.

"It's extremely diverse and widespread," he said.

Wheat farmers lost a "fairly large amount" of their crop from the freeze, and the first alfalfa cutting will be significantly reduced, Clary said. Most of the peach and apple crops were ruined, central Kentucky vineyards took a beating, blueberry and blackberry producers suffered damage and a Carlisle County farmer reported losing an entire pecan crop, Clary said.

Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer recently asked Gov. Ernie Fletcher to seek federal disaster relief.

A statewide crop report issued Monday by the National Agricultural Statistics Services' Kentucky field office reflected the sudden downturn for the wheat crop.

According to the report, 64 percent of the wheat was rated poor or very poor. Another 20 percent was considered fair, 15 percent good and 1 percent excellent. Just two weeks ago, slightly more than three-fourths of the crop was rated good or excellent.

The state's barley also was hard hit by the freeze, with 88 percent of the crop rated very poor or poor, according to the crop report Monday.

Kentucky's wheat crop was valued at \$67.5 million in 2005 and \$78.4 million last year.

Wilferd, 39, had upped his wheat production in hopes of reaping higher market prices. Until the freeze, it was shaping up as a good move. His wheat looked as good or better than last year's crop, which averaged 82 bushels per acre - a personal best yield.

A stretch of unseasonably warm weather in March accelerated his crop's development, leaving it even more vulnerable when the cold spell arrived - including an especially cold Easter morning that caused considerable damage, he said.

"You look across the field and you see a lot of brown," Wilferd said. "The plants are starting to deteriorate, the ones that have died."

It's a plight faced by other wheat farmers. The Kentucky Small Grain Growers Association has said the damage could be the worst in 20 years.

Don Halcomb, a southern Kentucky wheat producer, said the cold temperatures cost him at least one-fourth of his wheat crop. "And it could certainly be more than that," he said.

Halcomb said he expects market prices to remain high, but "it's just a matter of whether you have anything to sell or not."

The freeze also threatened early-planted corn that was just emerging, including in Wilferd's fields.

"The verdict is still out on that, too," he said.

Wilferd had already planted about 400 acres of corn, putting him ahead of schedule because of warm temperatures in March that made ground conditions ideal, he said.

About half of his planted corn had emerged and got caught by the late freeze.

"It's starting to grow back, but it's not 100 percent," Wilferd said. "I'll have to make one of those decisions, whether it's worth saving or replanting."

Wilferd said he's seen late freezes before, but "never like this."

"This is definitely unprecedented," he said. "We've not seen this type of damage ever in the wheat crop at this stage of the year. I hope we'll never see it again."

[Previous Page](#) [Return to Search](#)

Copyright © 2001-2003 Commonwealth of Kentucky.
All rights reserved.
Generated Date: 5/16/2007 4:40:14 PM